

Kyodan News Letter

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN
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...TO BRING RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES...

a letter* from a Korean student,
who is a political prisoner,
to his mother:



It brought tears of anger to my eyes to see these very young students sent to provincial prisons far from their homes. I gave a blanket to one friend being sent to X prison, where he has no relatives nearby. If you have another old blanket at home, please send it to me.

Mother, I give thanks to God that we can participate in the suffering and tragedy of Korean history. To endure these hardships is actually to share the joy of a new creation, of victory and progress. This is also true for you, Mother, outside these prison walls. Please be a source of strength to the families of others who are imprisoned. Please do not look sad, but give them encouragement. Our hearts are at peace, as we are increasingly able to sort out right from wrong. You too, Mother, must do likewise. How can we, under present circumstances, even think of our own release? What would simply getting out of prison accomplish? You must not think that the passing of 1974 has wrought any change in our spirits. Dear Mother, when you pray please do not pray for our "release." Pray instead for our maturity and ultimate victory, and for the sake of democracy....

The least sign of concern from the outside gives a great boost to those inside prison. Among us are some who have no personal funds and receive no gifts from outside; and some are really freezing because they have no winter underwear. I gave half of what you sent me to another prisoner....

* Quoted from Sekai, Feb. 1975, in one of the series of "Dispatches from Korea" by "T.K." Dated December, it was written during a "display of slackened control" and before announcement of the Feb. 12 "referendum." Some recent reports indicate that dispersal of the students to provincial prisons and being mixed with common criminals, separated from colleagues, are beginning to erode the morale of some.

> In February the National Christian Council of Japan brought George Ogle, missionary deported from Korea, to Japan to delineate the Korea situation at a series of prayer meetings, public gatherings and teach-ins in the Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto areas.

> Japan Christians--and people outside the church as well are contributing funds for prisoners and their families for supplies and legal expenses, and for the continuation of the newspaper, Dong-a Ilbo, the voice of freedom.

> In the Japan Christian Center and other places, regular prayer meetings are being held for Korean political prisoners and their families, in solidarity with prayer meetings at the National Council of Churches and throughout Korea.

REVERBERATIONS AFTER THE ASSEMBLY

Reactions to the 18th General Assembly are gradually coming in from individuals, groups and districts. This was the Assembly that attempted to find common ground through recognizing all positions and views as relative and that produced a few "fruits."

One subject under question is the action labelling the 1968 Assembly's support for the Expo '70 Christian Pavilion a "mistake." The OSAKA District executive committee has issued a "public query" asking how the General Assembly understands its responsibility toward those clergy, church members and organizations, including the National Christian Council of Japan and the World Council of Churches, which cooperated in the Pavilion project (partly on the basis of the 1968 Assembly's support of it).

Another statement issued over the names of former KYODAN and NCCJ moderator Isamu OMURA and eleven other persons, expressed regret for the decision that, in the name of the General Assembly, limits individuals who act on the basis of Christian conscience.

Both Jiro NISHIMURA, honorary president of Osaka Jo Gakuin and secretary general of the Christian Pavilion Committee, and Tamotsu HASEGAWA, president of the Kyodan National Laymen's Association and leader in the Pavilion movement, have issued statements criticizing the present Kyodan administration and declaring their intention to withhold cooperation, but both statements are personal and their application somewhat vague.

A statement from another individual called for the freezing of all activities because of a lack of confidence in the new Executive and because the election process provided no seat for the so-called minority voice.

In the midst of these swirls, what are the deeper currents within the various districts? The following summary is based primarily on reports in the Feb. 8 Kyodan Shimpō (No. 3817).

With the exception of OSAKA, most districts seem by and large to see the decisions repudiating the Christian Pavilion support and Tokyo Union Theological Seminary's action toward students as forward steps, although the nuances differ.

NISHI-CHUGOKU sees these decisions as a process that will produce a new direction for the Kyodan. KANAGAWA District interprets them as something the districts will

have to deal with, providing substance for the real formation of the district's identity.

Strongly worded complaints over failure to deliberate the ministerial examination issue have come from individuals personally involved, from local churches and from districts. Some statements express the position that recognition of those who have already passed the examination and the examination system itself should be dealt with separately. Others insist the two be taken up together.

Three districts--OSAKA, TOHOKU and SHIKOKU--have called upon the Executive Committee to recognize those who have passed the qualifying examination as soon as possible. NISHI-CHUGOKU, on the other hand, says the 19th General Assembly should be convened sometime during 1975 to take up the whole issue. SHIKOKU has taken a little more forceful attitude and is proceeding with plans to ordain qualified applicants at a district assembly.

As for the convening of the Executive Committee, which has not yet met officially, various districts are calling for this to be done without further delay. KYOTO District says, "Yes, we want the committee to begin functioning as soon as possible, but it should not rush immediately into administrative affairs but should first dig into the problems of the previous Executive and clarify how the new Committee ought to conduct itself." And this is probably the hope of most people.

TOKAI District has expressed concern over whether dialog with Tokyo Union Theological Seminary has been broken and over what happens to the position of people who supported the Pavilion, but says it wishes to continue to cooperate with other districts as a part of the Kyodan.

Officers of HOKKAI District observe that "it is useless to try to evaluate the effectiveness of the General Assembly when both the Executive Committee and ministerial examination discussions are at a standstill."

Will the TODA stance, as set forth at the General Assembly, provide a basis for reaching decisions where there are highly polarized opinions? Will it bring about dialog with various groups? How will it deal with bills passed by the 18th Assembly? Obviously--while the 18th General Assembly is evaluated as having made some progress--many obstacles remain to be surmounted.

AUTHOR OF BEST SELLERS WRITES GUIDE TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible is called "great literature," but if you spend your time reading it like you do popular reading matter, it won't strike you as "great literature," Ayako Miura tells her readers in the Preface to her new guidebook to the Old Testament.* "If you don't find its gems of truth, it will be meaningless."

Miura, 53, is a popular novelist and a member of the Asahikawa Rokujo Church. She has written many novels, several of which have appeared as serials in major women's magazines or in the newspapers. Her Old Testament guide appeared first serially in the Shinto no Tomo (Kyodan laymen's magazine) between August 1972 and March 1974. Miura has also appeared on church-sponsored radio and TV programs.

Certainly many people have received a Bible from someone but the number who have read the Bible is small, and the number who have discovered its truths even smaller. The Old Testament is particularly hard to understand. The author says that because she herself misunderstood it and tended to be prejudiced against it, she felt the need for a guidebook that would be easily understood. Accordingly she decided, as a lay woman, to write such a book for the laity.

One of the things that most impresses the reader is how well the author has achieved her purpose. This is not a commentary by a theologian or pastor that gives precedence to dogma or expository. Its effectiveness lies in the fact that it is just what the name implies--a guidebook to life. Mrs. Miura tries to consider how the issues faced in one's own life and by all human beings are reflected in the words of the Bible and, in particular, how the Biblical message confronts the issues of today--the inhumanity of man in war, the common feelings of jealousy, competition. In this book are strung together, like the beads of a rosary, warnings that startle, remarkable witnesses to faith, sermonettes.

This is a book filled with the enthusiasm of the person who seeks light and love in the darkness of human society and of the faith of the writer, who reads and rereads the stories, the Law, the Prophets, and even the messages that she cannot fully grasp. And from her fervent prayer that this book may be the means by which even one more person may become familiar with the Bible, one discovers her evangelical heart.

In a few places there is the danger that the writer's own thinking weighs too heavily or that her understanding may be too narrow, but as the guidebook which it was intended to be, it is a very readable introduction for young and old alike.

*Kyuyako Seisho Nyumon--hikari to ai o mitomete (A guidebook to the Old Testament--in search of light and love) by Ayako Miura. Tokyo: Kobunsha (Kappa Books) 1974

SAWA TRANSLATES HISTORY OF KOREAN CHRISTIANITY

The Rev. Mr. Masahiko Sawa, a Kyodan minister serving on the faculty of the Hankoku Theological Seminary in Seoul, has translated from Korean into Japanese the History of Korean Christianity, which the Kyodan Board of Publications has now published.

Reviewer Robert Fukada writes in the Winter 1975 issue of The Japan Quarterly that in the book, originally presented as lectures at Yonsei University in Seoul, "Professor Min Kyung-bae does a magnificent job in giving us new insights into the historically rich Church of Korea.... It is certainly not a rosy and glorious picture Professor Min portrays, but the life of the Church we come across in the book has in its shadow a clear vision of the Cross, with its darkness and suffering but also with the unbreakable strength and glory of the Lord of history." He notes that "In a way it is rough reading for a Japanese," because it is a "sharp indictment of Japan and Japanese Christians." To JCQ readers--many of whom are missionaries and scholars of Japanese affairs, Fukada says, "Because of its importance to our understanding of the Christian heritage in this part of Asia, I present it to you as 'must' reading."

*Kankoku Kirisutokyo-shi (History of Korean Christianity) by Min Kyung-bae, translated by Masahiko Sawa. Tokyo: The Kyodan Board of Publications, 1974.

"GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES, YES? BUT A RUPTURE? NO"

According to a survey by Asahi Shimbun reported in its Jan. 1 issue, Japanese young people have a "dark" image of present society and think the 21st Century will be even worse. Their elders, on the other hand, have a "bright" image and think the 21st Century will be better.

Age and attitude are closely correlated in the responses with the biggest contrast found between those in their 50s (who faced death and gave up friends, education and pleasures

for the war but who now represent the backbone of the society) and those in their 20s (born after the end of World War II).

In spite of the sharp differences, however, Asahi Shimbun commentators felt the split is not enough to constitute a rupture but may rather indicate a healthy society and indicate that Japanese society is beginning to settle into a pattern for the first time since 1945. (Below are capsuled summaries from some of the 22 questions asked in the national survey.)

SOCIETY: CHAOTIC/BRIGHT

Which word best describes society today?

chaotic, confused 39%
economic 28
unequal 25
free 16
degenerate 11
social welfare 8

People in their 20s checked negative qualities--*chotic, unequal, degenerate*; their elders, *free, social welfare*.

21ST CENTURY: BETTER/WORSE

Do you think the 21st Century will be

better?.....31%
worse?.....29
no change?.....20

Pessimism characterized the young people; optimism increased with age.

WORK/FAMILY

Which type of man do you like?

work-oriented44%
family-oriented28

Among those in their early 20s *work-oriented* fell to 33%, *family-oriented* rose to 38%.

What's your view toward work?

throw yourself into it... 53%
have to work to live30

Again, *have to work to live* came more from 20-year-olds.

What is most important to you now?

health21%
happy home17
family and children ...16
love, trust, harmony ...12
money 9
work 5
security 5
myself 5
no reply 7

Those in their 20s favored *love, trust, harmony in life*; those between 30 and 60, *home and family*, those 60 and over, *health*.

What kind of life do you want to lead?

just ordinary42%
improving myself17
enjoying life freely ...15
making things better ...13

Those in their 20s emphasized *self-improvement, freedom*; 30 and 40-years olds, an *ordinary kind of life*, those 50 and over, *making things around them better*.

RESPONSIBLE/IRRESPONSIBLE

What do you think about the generation in its 50s?

responsible34%
persevering29
considerate21

What do you think of those in their 20s?

self-centered40%
individualistic34
irresponsible20
lethargic14
impudent, rude12

Do you think children today are growing up "free"?

yes55%
no37

Those above 45 tended to say "yes," percentage rising with age, citing *freedom*, and an *abundance of things*. Those under 35--the postwar generation--tended to say "no", citing *study pressure, conformity, bad environment*.

AIKOKUSHUGI - PATRIOTISM

How about *aikokushugi*?

essential, important...20%
don't get the point...17
have a good feeling...15
everyone feels it...10
think of war 8

The age of 40 was the dividing line: as age increased positive attitude toward *aikokushugi* increased; the younger the respondents, the lower the positive response.

A VIDEO CASSETTE TAPE of the Kyodan 18th General Assembly, 25 minutes in length, has been produced and is available in Japanese or with English commentary. Two additional 30-minute tapes, one on the Moderator's position and the new Executive Committee members, the other on the Christian Pavilion and Tokyo Union Theological Seminary debates at the Assembly, are in production and will be available soon. For information about the tapes, contact George Gish, Kyodan, Room 31, Japan Christian Center, 551 Totsukamachi 1-chome, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160, Japan. Copies of the 25-minute tape have been sent to Rev. Paul Schneiss, German Mission Center, 7 Stuttgart 1, Vogelsangstr. 62, W. Germany; Dr. E. F. Carey, United Church of Canada, 85 St. Clair Ave., E. Toronto, M4T 1M8, Canada; Dr. In Sik Kim, The Presbyterian Church in the U.S., 341 Ponce de Leon Ave., Atlanta, Ga. 30342, U.S.A.